

# YOUTH LIBERATION NOW

Vol. 1



I was afraid to write this zine at first. It's scary putting yourself into the world. As a young person it's even worse, being forced to exist in a world that invalidates your thoughts and feelings. As I write this I can hear the refrains rattling around my head (said by adults who know less than I do):



"You're too young to know what you're talking about."



"I thought the same thing when I was your age but now that I'm an adult I know better."



"You'll grow out of it."

In response, I roll my eyes. No one should say these things and no one should have to hear them. We all deserve to be listened to and respected, no matter our age. That is why I am here.

You're probably wondering who exactly I am at this point. I will tell you this. I'm an anarchist and an anti-fascist and a 16 year old girl. I don't see any contradictions there, though I can tell a lot of people do. Like the old people that glare at me for the patches on my bag. They probably think I should shut up. I won't. I am also an unschooler, an artist and a survivor of public school. I write, I draw, I paint, I sew, I take pictures, and I think too much.

My dedication to not shutting up extends to this zine. This zine is about everything that relates to youth, education, and youth liberation. It will be written from an anarchist perspective because I am an anarchist and I am the one writing it.

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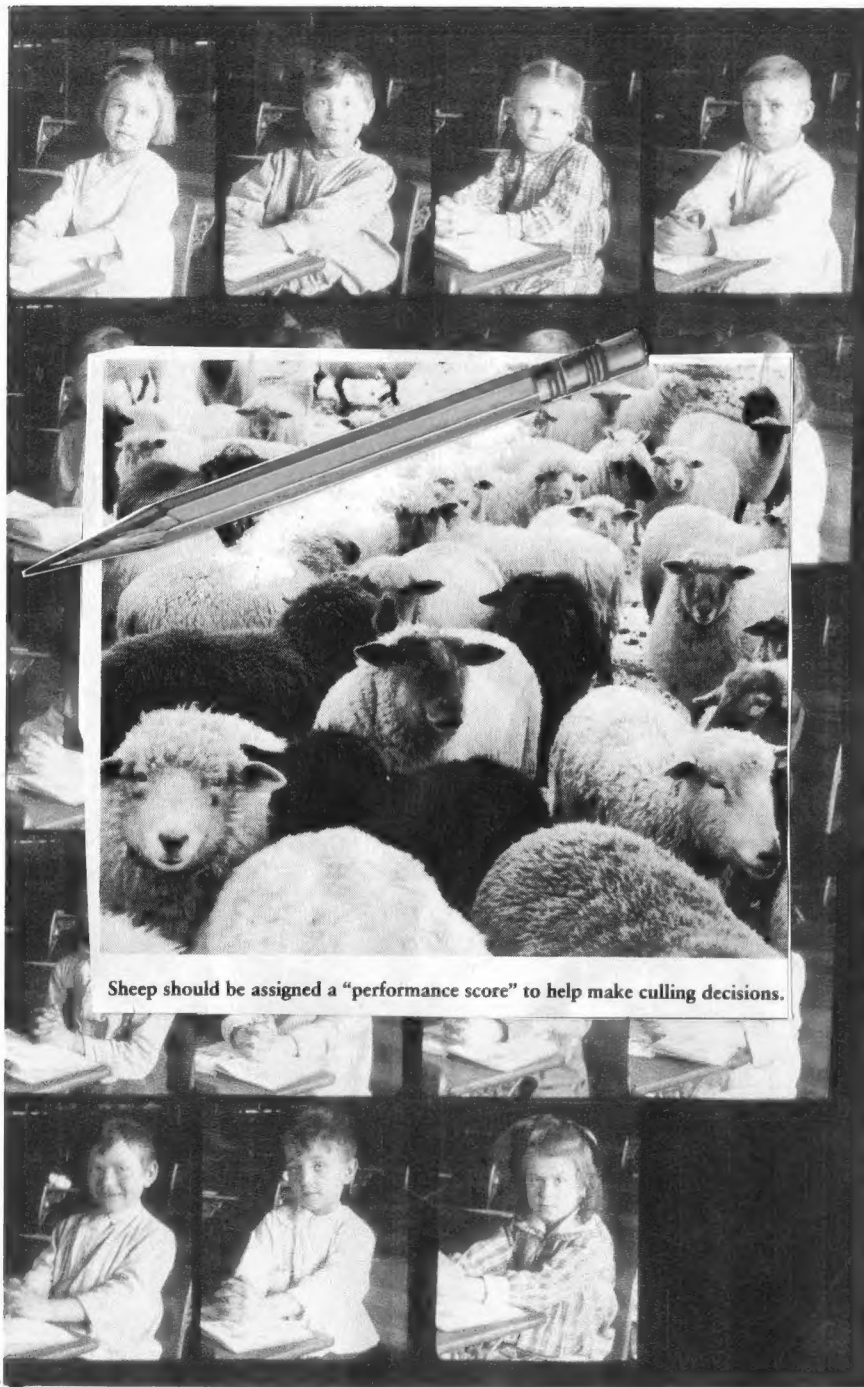
I am looking for anyone else who feels passionately about youth liberation and education who might want to submit and help out. Any ideas or thoughts are welcome! Feel free to contact me by email. Topics of later issues include unschooling/homeschooling, public school, ~~anarchism~~ anarchism, and personal experiences of young people.

If you'd like me to send you future volumes of this zine, let me know your address as well as how many copies you'd like either by email at:

youthliberationnow@protonmail.com  
or by mail at:

P.O. box 10330 Pittsburgh, PA 15234

Donations are appreciated! :) 



(21)

What to expect:  
everything that matters when you're a teenager and  
isn't taken seriously anywhere else  
personal experiences with school

~~how~~

how to get an education outside of school

poems

film pictures

guides for organizing

angry teenage girl rants

intersectionality

For this first issue, I'd like to cover what youth liberation means to me as well as its history. Past and current movements have heavily inspired my thinking. It's important to understand their history to learn and grow from it. They were the seed and we hope to be the blossom.



(2)

Revolutionary Letter #22  
Diane Di Prima

what do you want  
your kids to learn, do you care  
if they know factoring, chemical formulae, theory  
of numbers, equations, philosophy, semantics  
symbolic logic, latin, history, so-called, which is  
merely history of mind of western man, least interesting  
of numberless manifestations on this planet?

do you care  
if he learns to eat off the woods, to set  
a broken arm, to mend  
his own clothes, cook simple food, deliver  
a calf or baby? if there are cars should he not  
be able to keep his running?  
how will he learn these things, will he learn them  
cut off in a plaster box, enased  
in a larger cement box called 'school' dealing with paper  
from morning till night, grindin g no clay or mortar, no  
pigment, setting no seedlings in black earth  
come spring, how will he  
know to trap a rabbit, build a raft,  
to navigate by stars, or find safe ground  
to sleep on? what is he doing all his learning years  
inside, as if the p lanet were no more thana vehicle  
for carrying our plastic constructs around the sun



Some ideas for school resistance from the Ann Arbor  
Youth Liberation in 1970:

(disclaimer: this is all hypothetical, only do these  
things \*in minecraft\* if you will. I don't endorse  
any of this, I'm just passing it on.)

- You can get together signatures of as many teachers  
as possible, glue them down on a sheet of paper,  
and print up copies of that so that if kids want to  
forge passes, etc., they can copy these signatures.
- You can squirt fast-hardening, permanent glue into  
locks on doors, telephones, and anyplace else you  
can think of.
- You can rip off silverware, dishes, etc. from you  
(sic) school cafeteria, towels from the gym, and so  
on. Once you've liberated them, donate them to move-  
ment groups that can use extra supplies.

And some of my own ideas:

- Wheatpasting posters is always a fun way to spread  
your message. To do so, you'll need 1 cup of flour  
and 2 cups of water. Mix the flour and water in a  
saucepan and boil until the mixture thickens. Grab  
a paintbrush, posters, and your flour-water mixture  
and you're ready to go. You can post them up around  
your school, ideally in locations without security  
cameras. You could easily get in trouble with this  
one, so be careful.
- Make every single assignment you do relate to school  
and youth liberation in some way. For example, if  
you have to write an essay make it about the issues  
you have with school.
- All of these ideas work better if you organize with  
other students. You'll have more support and impact  
that way. It's harder for your school to punish 30  
students than just you or you and one friend.

If you have any more ideas for resistance or any  
success stories, contact me! They will likely be  
published in the next issue.



Just in case you do realize that you are beautiful, we make sure that you can't appreciate it, by telling you that you are confused and overly emotional during these traumatic years and for pete's sake don't go and make any decisions for yourself, and don't let loose and have any free wild experiences with life. Dogs in mangers, we turn the power of adolescence into a weak disease. Teachers sit in the teachers' lounge and laugh about you behind your backs.

Isn't he cute, they say. Poor Kristy, with no idea of how she sticks out in that magenta skirt. This, from people who are overweight, in ruts, out of touch with their dreams, insecure, and otherwise at least as imperfect as the subjects of their conversation. Thank god I'm not that age any more, says Mrs. Wallace, leaning her double chin over her desk. We read tacky cute articles in *Family Circle* called "How to Survive the Terrible Teens: An Owner's Guide." The owner being the parent, of course. *School*, yes, is something to survive, but being a teenager is something that flies.

We force you to act younger than you are, legally withholding your ability to control your own life. *The World Book* encyclopedia says, "Most teenagers mature psychologically at the rate set by their society. As a result, psychological adolescence normally lasts at least as long as the period of legal dependence." Certainly, there is no *biological* limitation to teenage independence. In other times and places, teenagers have commonly married, raised children, held jobs, operated businesses, and occasionally ruled countries.

*It seems you're talking about more than just schools here. Aren't you getting off the point a bit?*

Yes, school is not the only bad guy in the war against whole adolescence. But it is our culture's deathly substitute for powerful growing experiences. It is the way we take your time so you don't explore your own inklings of truth. It is where you learn to be passive instead of active. Quitting school won't guarantee you a healthy, passionate adolescence, but at least it will remove the biggest obstacle against that flowering.

When I say youth Liberation,  
this is what I mean.

\*note: I use children/youth/young people to mean anyone under the age 18. Not to say that people above 18 don't experience ageism, but people under the age of 18 are the main victims, especially in regards to legal oppression.

**I mean that young people shouldn't have to live under the threat of violence**, whether that be from parents, or teachers, or the police. Ageism confronts children with enormous violence in every front of their lives.

I can't mention violence without talking about police brutality. Police frequently harass, maim, and kill (mainly black) children and teenagers. We think of George Stinney, the youngest person to be executed by the US government. He was only 14 when he was killed by the electric chair in 1944. We think of 12 year old Tamir Rice, executed by the police for carrying a toy gun. We think of every child arrested in schools and sent to private for profit prisons. We think of police strip searching high schoolers and denying them their constitutional rights. We see this and we see the extent of violence directed against children by the state.

Violence against children isn't limited to the state though. In America, it is completely legal for parents to hit their children. Nearly seventy percent of those parents agree that "sometimes a child just needs a good, hard spanking."<sup>1</sup> Eighty five percent of American children will experience some form of physical punishment (i.e. abuse) from their parents by the time they enter high school.<sup>2</sup> Parents can and do physically and emotionally abuse their children, to which children have little recourse.

The few paths children do have confront them with even more violence. Schools, which theoretically protect children from violence at home, are just as much of abusers as parents are. In 19 states teachers and staff at public schools are allowed to use corporal punishment (i.e. use physical force as punishment).<sup>3</sup> In all but two states private school teachers can use corporal punishment. Schools take full advantage of this, some using it as

the preferred method of discipline. In 2014, a child was hit once every 30 seconds in a public school.<sup>4</sup>

For black and special needs children violence in schools is at its worst.<sup>5</sup> According to a 2009 report by the ACLU "African Americans constitute 17.1 percent of the nationwide student population, but 35.6 percent of those paddled."<sup>6</sup> For special needs students, the difference in punishment leads to them being punished at almost two times the rate of other students. Special needs children are also subjected to what could only be called torture. To discipline students, teachers and staff can lock children in solitary confinement. This is done in padded locked rooms, dystopically called "quiet rooms".<sup>7</sup>

Most violent abuse from parents and teachers happens for small, unassuming reasons. For spilling something perhaps. Not picking up when they were supposed to. Being distracted when an adult is telling them something. In schools, small rule violations like going to the bathroom without permission, dress code violations, or chewing gum have led to violent punishment.<sup>6</sup>

Any little thing can lead to senseless violence for the simple crime of being a child. Violence against children is not meant for discipline or whatever gross excuse someone might give. It is about systematically oppressing a group of people. Any hierarchy needs violence to enforce and feed itself with and the adult/child hierarchy is no different.

**I mean that children deserve the same freedom and respect that every human being does.**<sup>8</sup> When I hear people say they are for the liberation of all, that "all" too often excludes children. Somewhere in between "liberation" and "all" some people get mixed up. They decide that children must be guided and taught and controlled, not trusted and respected.

Most of us don't respect children because we are told to. Modern science claims children are underdeveloped and have no ability to make rational decisions. This is the same way the western world has justified oppressing groups of people

Why? Probably because every hierarchical society seems to need n\*\*\*\*\* to put down, and women and African-Americans won't take it anymore. When someone puts you down, you want to put somebody else down.

Dr. Seuss, reliable social commentator, wrote a story called "King Looie Katz." King Looie Katz makes Fooie Katz carry his long proud royal tail around. So Fooie Katz sticks his own nose in the air and makes another cat haul *his* tail. Pretty soon all the cats in Katzenstein are walking around carrying the tail of the cat in front of them... except the very last little cat, who doesn't have anyone to carry his.

That little cat, who is a bit like you, takes action. He yells "I Quit!" and slams down the tail in his paws. Everybody else follows suit. The story concludes:

And since that day in Katzen-stein,  
All cats have been more grown-up.  
They're all more demo-catic  
Because each cat holds his own up.

Another reason adults make fun of you is that they're jealous. Teenagers are beautiful and fresh; the perfume of a flower is concentrated in the bud. Yes, many teenagers are awkward, pimpled, or strangely tall and thin. Far more adults, however, are awkward (having forgotten how to use their bodies), sallow-skinned (too much sitting in air-conditioned offices) and predictably heavy (not enough skateboarding).

A healthy adult society would acknowledge the beauty of youth, make up some good poems about it, and then not think about it too much. There are certainly more productive activities in life than fixating on the rosy cheeks you'll never have again. But since we do not have a healthy adult society, we get all bent out of shape over it, create a cult of young-beautiful-people-in-magazines, and punish real live teenagers by telling them they are ugly.

ridiculed, maybe they will do something drastic, but their search is usually only an earnest attempt to understand the depths.

Others gravitate toward the light—daytime psychedelic colors, long solitary hikes. They determine to become a dancer or artist instead of something "realistic." If their family is sedately Catholic, maybe they go to the Assembly of God and speak in tongues. If their family goes to the Assembly of God, maybe they climb a hill and offer flowers to Apollo.

Schools—and many parents—lie a lot at this point, telling you you're out of touch with reality. The truth is, you're out of touch with the expectations and patterns of an *unreal*, man-made industrial society. You are in touch with the reality that counts. Look at the Milky Way some night and think about it. You'll know. In *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions*, a Sioux medicine man talks about the reality of "the white world" versus the deeper reality of artists and Indians:

*Artists are the Indians of the white world. They are called dreamers who live in the clouds, improvident people who can't hold onto their money, people who don't want to face "reality." They say the same things about Indians. How the hell do these frog-skin people know what reality is? The world in which you paint a picture in your mind, a picture which shows things different from what your eyes see, that is the world from which I get my visions. I tell you this is the real world, not the Green Frog Skin World. That's only a bad dream, a streamlined, smog-filled nightmare.*

*Because we refuse to step out of our reality into this frog-skin illusion, we are called dumb, lazy, improvident, immature, other-worldly. It makes me happy to be called "otherworldly," and it should make you so. It's a good thing our reality is different from theirs.*

Furthermore...

Schools—and this society they represent—go beyond blocking your visionary tendencies. They further cripple you by making fun of you, as if you were not quite human, the new n\*\*\*\*r

throughout history. It wasn't long ago that women were considered scientifically lesser and more emotional than men and POC had their skulls measured and compared. Today, science tells us that children are inherently lesser than adults. Most people accept this as fact.

Young children and adults *are* different. Children do not have as much life experience, and lack raw intelligence, memory, and reasoning skills. Children need help and support to survive. But this is no reason to limit children's rights. People generally agree that taking away the rights of adults with low IQs or low reasoning skills would not be a good idea. Rights are protections and safeties, not luxuries. When it comes to children, things are somehow different.

When we talk about teens the absurdity of taking away young people's freedom is clear. Teenagers are commonly described as impulsive, easily peer pressured, irresponsible, and rebellious. This is backed up by the idea of the "teen brain" or an underdeveloped prefrontal cortex. We grossly generalize when we conclude that all teenagers and young people must have the same, often negative qualities and behaviors because of their brain's development. Robert Epstein, psychologist and author of *The Case Against Adolescence*, says this about the myth of the teen brain and the principle of correlation not equaling causation,

"The principle is crucially relevant to the teen brain concept because all the studies used to support this myth are correlational. They simply document average differences between the brains of teens and the brains of older adults. These differences are then said to explain the fact that teens in our culture are often troubled or troublesome."<sup>9</sup>

The science used to oppress teenagers is *bad*. It's deeply flawed, and I think that most of us sense this. Teenagers are not inherently irresponsible because of an underdeveloped brain. Behavior comes from environment, not from some fundamental flaw in our nature.

In other cultures and in the past, we accepted young people's competence and brought them into adult life as quickly as possible. Epstein has this to say in his book *The Case Against Adolescence*,

"Through most of human history, our ancestors had children shortly after puberty, just as the members of all nonhuman species do to this day. Whether we like the idea or not, our young ancestors must have been capable of providing for their offspring, defending their families from predators, cooperating with others, and in most other respects functioning fully as adults. If they couldn't function as adults, their young could not have survived, which would have meant the swift demise of the human race. The fact that we're still here suggests that most young people are probably far more capable than we think they are."<sup>10</sup>

There was no such thing as adolescence for thousands and thousands of years. There was no reason to disrespect and restrict teenagers and children. We literally would have *died out as a species* if we restricted young people as much as we do now. But now, in the year 2021, we play with the idea of extending youth until 25 years old because of "brain development".

Instead of infantilizing young people, welcome them into the world. Children should be able to participate in their world and life. Whether that participation be within the family unit, school, government, or their own life decisions, children deserve the ability to participate in decisions that affect them. This is a fundamental part of taking children seriously and giving them the freedom and respect they need and deserve.

And instead of disrespecting and oppressing, we should reach out to those younger than us with the idea of liberation in mind. We should strive to be respectful to all and value the opinions of others, even if they are smaller and younger than us. We must question the ageist ideas we hold. They benefit no one but those in power. Approach children as an equal, not as an authority.

it would look mighty bad under the inspection of visionary young people. Get it? The Powers That Be do not invite their young to seek visions, because those visions would force a Big Change.

No force of dullness and ignorance is strong enough, however, to stop you from seeking. Eternity, God, Goddess, whatever you call it—is too strong. It will get in, though it has to battle school and other strongholds of society. Writers and artists bring us some inklings, though when school introduces us to them, it nearly destroys their potency.

The Big Mystery creeps in through all your fascinations with the unknown—music with heavy pulses and strange lyrics, sexual fantasies and experiences, the occult, drugs (including alcohol). Obviously, some of these things can be taken to unhealthy excess. Drug abuse is a disease. Drug *use*, however, is often the sign of someone's intense spiritual quest. Hallucinogens can be an easy, though risky, way to tap into visionary experience. There are other ways, healthier though more difficult—through trance and fasting, for instance.

Unfortunately, most adults refuse to acknowledge the powerful impulse behind any of these activities, labeling them as "bad," as if that would make them go away. Why? Their own visionary tendencies got cancelled out by society at sweet sixteen. Misery, as they say, loves company. It is *incredibly* painful for an emotional cripple to be around someone who is emotionally free. And so most adults would rather pretend desperately to visionary teenagers that the world is nothing more than green lawns, white socks, and recently sanitized carpets.

Visionary tendencies come in dark and light, or a combination thereof.

Some teenagers want dark experiences. They walk in cemeteries at night. They write stories about suicide; they obsess on black clothing and Pink Floyd lyrics. None of it means they are "bad" or twisted. When they are finished playing with the dark, they will understand the light much better. If they are ignored or



ready to try wings. But you have to stay in—for *such* a long time—and keep your pencils sharpened. School is bad for your spirit, except the pep club kind.

It's no accident, I'm sure. The way our society is set up now, something's got to prevent visionary experience. Otherwise, ninety percent of the American monoculture would shatter. People who are fully and permanently awakened to the wildness and beauty in and around them make lousy wage-slaves. On the other hand, people who are *not* distracted by a wellspring of spiritual and sexual yearnings can assemble clock radios or automobiles very quickly, or focus their intellects on monthly sales charts.

More importantly, unawakened people are less likely to question the things in our society which are horrifically dull and ridiculous. The point of seeking any kind of visionary experience is to *see*. When vision comes to you, eternity is its black velvet backdrop. Everything else comes out on the stage to sing and dance. Some of it fits in with the grandeur of that backdrop, and some of it only clashes, looking ugly and cheap. You end up wanting to adjust your life so that it's full of stuff that fits in with eternity, and not crammed with things that don't matter.

Therefore, one reason many primal cultures can confidently guide their young toward visionary experiences is that they're not worried. They don't have to worry that the visions will show anything horrible about the society itself. If there *is* something going wrong with the cultural state of affairs, they want to know, so they can fix it.

In this culture the opposite is true. When you have a messy house, you don't offer a magnifying glass to your guests. You probably don't even open the curtains and let the light in.

If we did teenaged visions, democracy would get a boost, but the powers of Mass Production and Rat Racing Consumerism would take a dive. We would see that far too much of what we accept as "reality" is a blasphemy against true reality. Since our consumptive culture is out of balance with the rest of the universe,

**I mean that children should liberate themselves, without adult leadership.** Most current children's rights activism is neoliberal (neoliberal meaning prioritizing profits over people and the distilling of all human life into a corporate framework). Neoliberal youth work comes from a fear of and disdain for children, not from a desire to free children from systems of oppression. A real youth liberation movement should be founded in anarchist ideas, and most importantly should be led by youth for youth.

Most current children's programs see children as incomplete and lesser than adults. They focus on making kids into something else, most often a colonized idea of an adult. These groups and programs often focus on educating and otherwise changing children, identifying a "problem" and fixing it. In this way, children are seen as commodities to be shaped, not as people.

Youth liberation sees children as they are. Children are complete human beings with thoughts and opinions that are just as valuable as adults'. Youth liberation sees that children know their needs and wants better than anyone else and are capable of self advocating. Youth liberation aims to abolish the hierarchy between adults and children for a fairer, more just world.

Neoliberal children's programs are not the same as youth liberation. Youth liberation is ours, by and for young people. Neoliberal youth programs are theirs, the adults and the capitalists. Youth liberation disrupts and destroys systems of oppression. Youth programs reinforce oppression. Youth liberation will not function like a business. Our liberation is not something capitalists will profit from. We are whole and we will liberate ourselves. Young people know the most about their own struggles and needs. The oppressor, no matter how well intentioned, cannot speak for the oppressed people.

A better world will not come from sending children off to compulsory schools. It will not come from complacency to child abuse. It will not come from adults advocating for youth and repeating the same systems of oppression they claim to be against.

A better world will come from youth standing up for themselves and demanding the respect they deserve. It will come from school strikes that span the nation and lawless conversations. It will come from affinity groups and basement meetings and banner drops. It will come from the collective impulse of the young to destroy what destroys us.

**This is what I mean when I say youth liberation.**

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## The power and Magic of Adolescence vs. the Insufferable Tedium of School

(Excerpt from the Teenage Liberation Handbook  
by Grace Llewellyn)



If you ever read any anthropology, one of the first things you notice is that primal cultures simmer up all of their mystery and magic and power and ask their teenagers to drink deeply.

A sixteen-year-old Dakota boy fasts until an empowering vision overtakes him. A newly-menstruating Apache girl becomes the goddess White Painted Woman in an intense, joyful theatrical ritual which lasts four days. All over the planet, traditional cultures provide various ritual experiences to adolescents, bringing them into contact with the deepest parts of themselves and their heritage.

There is danger and pain, as well as beauty and exultation, in some of these traditional ways of initiating people into adulthood. I don't want to make any shallow statement that we've got it all wrong because we don't ask pubescent boys to endure three days of biting wasps.

But I would like you to reflect for a minute on the contrast between the way our society initiates its young and the vivid undertakings of the primal world.

What do you get instead of vision? You get school—and all of the blind passivity and grey monotone it trains into you.

For an institution to ask you, during some of your most magical years, to sit still and be good and read quietly for six or more hours each day is barely even thinkable, let alone tolerable. How do you feel when the sun comes out in March and makes the most golden day imaginable, but you have to stay in and clean your room?

In case you've lost touch with your burgeoning beauty, let me remind you that that's exactly what's going on, for at least six years of your teenaged schooling. Adolescence is a time of dreaming, adventure, risk, sweet wildness, and intensity. It's the time for you to "find yourself," or at least go looking. The sun is rising on your life. Your body is breaking out of its cocoon and

students in Britain and the USA organized for themselves.

The schools Action Union formed in Britain. They aimed to ban corporal punishment. Thousands of students would join marches.



In Ann Arbor MI, students formed the Ann Arbor Youth Liberation organization.



Despite the efforts of these early movements, youth remain as oppressed as ever. What will be the next picture in this story? What will we do?

## An illustrated history of youth liberation

Indigenous societies treated children well.

Remember that your children are not your own, but are lent to you by the creator.

— Mohawk proverb



And the colonizers...



children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households... They contradict their parents, chatter before company... and tyrannize their teachers.

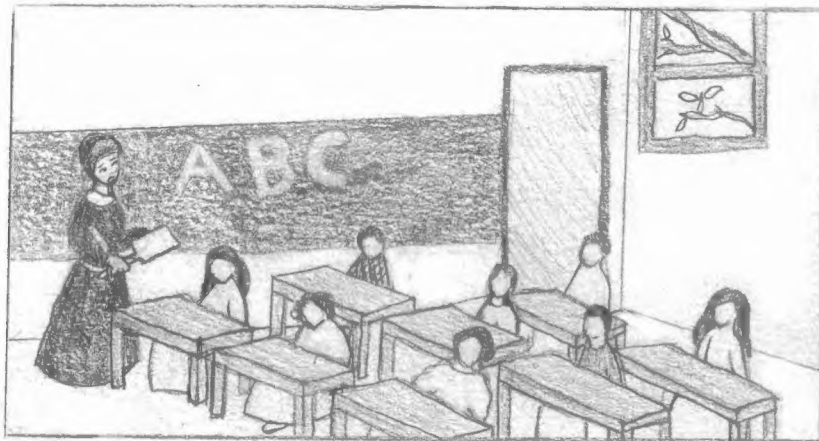
— Socrates

The apparent ease with which children learn is their ruin. You fail to see that this very facility proves that they are not learning. Their shining, polished brain reflects, as in a mirror, the things you show them, but nothing sinks in.

— Jean Jacques Rousseau



In 1851 Massachusetts was the first state to introduce compulsory schooling. By 1918 every state required compulsory school.



Our schools are, in a sense, factories, in which the raw products (children) are to be shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life.

— Ellwood Cubberly, Head of Stanford's School of Education, 1916

During the same period, Native Americans were ethnically cleansed in boarding schools.



11



Kill the Indian, save the man.

— Richard Henry Pratt

The 1960s saw an explosion of voices in the youth rights movement.



Tinker vs Des Moines

It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech and expression at the schoolhouse gate.

— Justice Abe Fortas

School is the advertising agency which makes you believe that you need the society as it is.

— Ivan Illich



To trust children we must first trust ourselves... and most of us were taught as children that we could not be trusted.

— John Holt

The function of a child is to live his/her own life, not the life that his/her anxious parent think he/she should live, nor a life according to the purpose of the educators who think they know best.

— A.S. Neill



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